

Having thus described the preferred embodiment, the invention is now claimed to be:

1. A method of treating a food product comprising:
contacting an exterior of the food product with a decontaminant solution containing an antimicrobial agent which includes peracetic acid for a sufficient time to microbially decontaminate the exterior of the food product.
2. The method of claim 1, further including:
rinsing the microbially decontaminated food product to remove the decontaminant solution.
3. The method of claim 1, further including:
sterile drying the decontaminated food products.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the peracetic acid in the decontaminant solution is at a concentration of from about 100 to about 4000 ppm.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the peracetic acid concentration is from about 1000 to about 2000 ppm.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of contacting the food product with the decontaminant solution includes spraying the decontaminant solution over the food product.
7. The method of claim 6, wherein the food product is sprayed with the decontaminant solution for a period of from about 10 seconds to 5 minutes.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the food product is sprayed with the decontaminant solution for a period of from about 1 to 2 minutes.

9. The method of claim 6, wherein the step of contacting the food product with the decontaminant solution includes transporting the food product on a conveyor past spray nozzles which spray the decontaminant solution over the food product.

10. The method of claim 6, further including:
recirculating the sprayed decontaminant solution.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the food product comprises hot dogs and the method further includes, prior to the step of contacting the exterior of the food product,
removing the hot dogs from casing skins.

12. The method of claim 3, further including, after the step of drying the food product:
aseptically packaging the food product.

13. A method of treating a food product comprising:
a) spraying the food product with a solution comprising peracetic acid in a first chamber; and
b) drying the food product in a second chamber.

14. The method of claim 13, further including:
c) after step a), rinsing the food product with a rinse fluid in a third chamber intermediate the first and second chambers.

15. The method of claim 13, further including:

conveying the food product through the first and second chambers on a conveyor system.

S² (2^a) 16. An apparatus for treatment of a food product comprising:

a first chamber;
spray nozzles disposed in the first chamber for spraying a decontaminant solution over the food product, the decontaminant solution including peracetic acid;
a source of the decontaminant solution;
a pump fluidly connected with the source of the decontaminant solution and the nozzles for supplying 10 pressurized decontaminant solution to the nozzles;
a second chamber;
a source of a drying gas connected with the second chamber for drying the decontaminated food product; and
a conveyor system which conveys the food product through 15 the first and second chambers.

17. The apparatus of claim 16, further including:

a third chamber intermediate the first and second chambers, the conveyor system conveying the food product through the third chamber;

5 a source of a rinse fluid connected with the second chamber which delivers a rinse fluid to the second chamber for rinsing the decontaminated food product.

18. The apparatus of claim 16, further including:

a recirculation system which recirculates the sprayed decontaminant solution to the nozzles.

A' added